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ABSTRACT

The position paper developed by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities stresses the need for systematic inservice programs for service providers. Deterrents cited to quality inservice programs include lack of planning and program availability. It is explained that the committee's recommendations were made after reviewing model inservice programs in use across the country. Recommendations include the following: use of a needs assessment prior to inception of inservice programs; selection of an inservice consultant or instructor based upon competence; development of inservice content and models based on a review of the needs of programs, students, and professionals (including flexible approaches to format); design and implementation of multidisciplinary inservice programs; consideration of availability of inservice programs based on geographic location, physical facilities, and travel time requirements; and continuation of support by administrative officials of effective inservice programs. (CL)

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INSERVICE PROGRAMS IN LEARNING DISABILITIES

A position paper of the
National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities
September 27, 1981

Inservice programs are the principal means through which educational agencies change the interaction between teachers and students. It is the position of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) that systematic inservice programs be established for persons who are responsible for providing programs and services to individuals with learning disabilities. The need for quality inservice programs is motivated by mandates of Public Law 94-142, the lack of consistent pre-service preparation and training in the learning disabilities, and by the recognition that professionals are responsible for the continued enhancement of their competencies. This paper presents some concerns and recommendations of the NJCLD with regard to the development of inservice programs for professionals who are providing services to individuals with learning disabilities.

Inservice programs are most effective when these activities are planned to meet local needs, are equally available to all teachers, administrators and specialists, and when there is clear support and provision made by local boards of education, superintendents, principals, and other administrative officials. However, it is too often the case that deterrents to the provision of effective inservice programs are encountered. Among these deterrents are the following: (a) a lack of appropriate planning and organization of goals and content prior to beginning the program; (b) inappropriate selection and use of personnel in consultative and faculty roles; (c) the presentation of material irrelevant to the needs of the participants; (d) limiting and restricting the scope of participation according to professional roles; and (e) a lack of program availability.

The NJCLD, following a careful consideration of these issues and after reviewing model inservice programs as they currently are used nationally, makes the following recommendations with regard to the design and implementation of inservice programs for professionals who are providing services to individuals with learning disabilities.

1. The NJCLD recommends that a needs assessment should be conducted prior to the beginning of inservice programs to ensure appropriate planning and implementation of these programs in the area of learning disabilities.

The design of inservice programs in learning disabilities should be based on an assessment of needs of students and professional personnel, e.g., principals, regular classroom teachers, special educators, learning disabilities specialists, speech-language pathologists and audiologists, reading specialists, school psychologists, vocational educators, and related services staff. When appropriate, the planning and implementation of inservice programs also should include parents and students. Participants should be given an opportunity to establish appropriate objectives and designate the content areas to be included in the inservice program. A prior consideration of needs will establish priorities to meet the participants goals, define content areas, and result in the use of appropriate consultative services and selection of faculty.

The following content areas, among others, should be considered in the needs assessment and in the planning and implementation of inservice programs.

- Human growth, development and their variations
- The psychology of learning
- The manifestations of learning disabilities
 - spoken language
 - reading
 - written expression
 - mathematics
 - reasoning
- Identification and assessment of the individual with learning disabilities
- Curriculum Issues, e.g.,
 - curriculum development, application and sequence
 - curriculum selection and adaptation of curricular materials
 - alternative curriculum
 - uniquely developed curriculum
 - the language of instruction
- Service delivery models in learning disabilities
- Teaching methods in learning disabilities
- Controversial issues in learning disabilities
- Behavioral and other psychological problems in learning disabilities,
e.g.,
 - peer relationships
 - social awareness and adjustment
 - drug abuse
 - alcohol abuse
 - delinquency
- Career and vocational planning for individuals with learning disabilities
- Issues related to the long-term nature of learning disabilities and the necessity for the development of a continuum of educational services (preschool, elementary, secondary, postsecondary)

2. The NJCLD recommends that the selection of any individual who will provide consultation services or act as faculty for the inservice programs should depend upon the person's competence to address content and to meet the specified goals and objectives of the participants.

It is essential to evaluate the skills and performance of those who provide consultative services and those who act as faculty. Of primary concern is the ability of consultants and faculty to complete stated objectives in planning and providing inservice programs.

3. The NJCLD recommends that the models and the content areas of an effective inservice program be based on a comprehensive review of the existing needs of programs, students and professional personnel.

Various models for presenting inservice programs should be explored. The models used should be selected following a comprehensive review of existing programs and student needs. It is important that individuals who will participate in the inservice programs have a major role in the planning and design of the inservice model that is used.

Presentation methods should not be restricted to didactic models. Demonstration teaching, the use of case study methods, tele-conference arrangements, self-instruction, and the use of teacher assistance teams should not be overlooked. In teacher assistance teams, for example, school-based personnel teams assume primary responsibility for planning and implementing consultative activities within their own school. These individuals should have access to supportive consultative services. The teacher assistance team, in turn, adapts and individualizes the material for local programmatic and professional needs. The National Inservice Network* may serve as a resource for models of effective inservice programs and could be used when design of inservice programs is considered.

Effective inservice programs also must reflect the unique and special needs of various educational settings. The programs should reflect the necessity for continuity of educational planning and ensure the articulation of the curriculum for individuals with learning disabilities. Care must be taken in adapting content to preschool, elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level requirements.

The effectiveness of inservice programs should be evaluated on both the short-term basis (through goal and objective attainment measurements) and on a long-term, longitudinal basis. The only meaningful evaluation in either case will be the changes in performance of individuals with learning disabilities. At the conclusion of the inservice program, on-going school based consultative services should be provided to professional participants so as to facilitate the continued development of newly acquired skills and methods of instruction and treatment.

4. The NJCLD recommends that multi-disciplinary inservice training programs be designed and implemented.

Inservice programs in learning disabilities have been provided by separating personnel according to professional roles. Regrettably, this has prevented appropriate communication among the various professions, e.g., principals, regular classroom teachers, learning disabilities specialists, speech-language pathologists and audiologists, reading specialists, school psychologists, vocational educators, and related services staff. This contradicts the mandate that assessment, planning and management of individuals with learning disabilities be multi-disciplinary in nature.

To meet this mandate, multi-disciplinary inservice training models should be developed. This will promote acquisition and use of competencies across the representative professions and increase inter-professional understanding, cooperation, and respect. Separation of personnel according to professional roles for purposes of inservice programs in learning disabilities is not warranted unless the training involves highly specialized skills or knowledge clearly relevant to only one professional group.

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5. The NJCLD recommends that careful consideration be given to issues of availability in the implementation of inservice programs.

The development and implementation of successful inservice programs must consider availability based on geographic location, physical facilities and travel time requirements. Inservice programs should be designed to meet the needs of personnel in urban, suburban, and rural areas. In addition, cost to participants must be considered and, wherever possible, controlled and minimized.

6. The NJCLD urges all local boards of education, superintendents, principals, and other administrative officials to continue their support of effective inservice programs.

The NJCLD recognizes the responsibilities of administrative officials to the entire educational system. The NJCLD urges administrative officials, including local boards of education, superintendents, and principals, to advocate for and ensure the viability of inservice programs through (a) personal participation in the programs, (b) development of appropriate and creative incentive programs for participating professionals, e.g., eligibility for credits toward maintenance of certification, tuition credit assistance for college or university course work, credits toward salary increments, use of extended employment, (c) permitting participation of professionals in the planning, implementation and evaluation of inservice programs, (d) provision of release time, (e) provision of financial support, and (f) identification of sources for funding inservice programs, e.g., federal, state, local, private, and public sources.

The eventual success of inservice programs ultimately will depend on the clear and consistent support of administrative officials. However, without cooperation at all levels of the educational system these inservice programs will not meet the needs of the students. The goal must always be the development of programs that reflect the needs of education staffs and parents as they work toward meeting the needs of individuals with learning disabilities.

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities is a Committee of cooperating organizations concerned with individuals with learning disabilities. Organizations represented are:

- Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- Division for Children with Communication Disorders, Council for Exceptional Children
- Council for Learning Disabilities
- International Reading Association
- The Orton Dyslexia Society

This is a final draft copy of a position paper of the NJCLD. This copy has been forwarded for final approval and adoption to the governing body of the member associations and final adoption is pending.

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